

We gained lots of experience building these things and getting into the thinking about it. This was the first time it dawned on me to think in these terms. I knew about the V-1 bombs and the V-2s. Both types had been in evidence on my trip through England and Belgium. As a matter of fact, both in London and Antwerp I had learned to seek cover in a basement entrance when the V-1 motor cut off and the click, click, click could not be heard. And on my way to visit a POL [petrol, oil, and lubricants] depot in Antwerp, we were running out of time and the officer guiding me said, "I think you better head back to Brussels because the visit to the depot will take too long to let you reach Brussels before dark." When we got to the edge of town they had a phone call waiting for him and there had been a V-2 bomb hit the depot about the time I would have been there. But I had just never thought of having any connection with such a weapon since.

So the Mobile District got started early into this aspect and then later on down the road, bingo, I run into the same thing again in positions like assistant chief for military construction, deputy chief, and Chief. I would run into von Braun again. It's just amazing how often these trails open up and keep crossing one another. I don't know that there is anything more that's vital, probably is and I don't know about it.

Q: Since you went from Mobile as District Engineer to Atlanta as Division Engineer, I would like to ask you to comment on the different roles as District and Division Engineer. Also, how did your work in those positions prepare you for your later assignments in OCE?

A: Well, first, from my point of view, would be the sudden shock of being ordered to Atlanta to become a Division Engineer. I had had three years in St. Paul District and just completed three years in the Mobile District, and here I was going to another rivers-and-harbors-type assignment. I had never thought about anything like that. But I went up to the Division and Colonel [Harry L.] Fox, who had been the deputy up there and whom I had known out in India--he was in General Farrell's engineering section in the theater headquarters--came down here to be District Engineer. Well, now moving from one

District to a Division in the same place, I recognized right off the bat, particularly after the history of minor conflicts that we had had and pretty well overcome, boy they are going to test me! So I went up there and reported in. And the first day I was sitting at my desk and the first piece of paper to hit me was a turn-down by the Division waiting for the signature of the Division Engineer on something the Mobile District had been trying to get worked a certain way for months and months.

Q: That would have been while you were the District Engineer?

A: Yes, while I was here. I had talked with the Division Engineer by phone and visited, and we had tried all kinds of things. Well, on this particular one I wasn't getting anywhere. So there it was for me to sign back to the District saying "no." I thought there was only one thing to do, so I signed it. I didn't say a word to anybody. Two days later the phone rang and it was Harry Fox in Mobile. He said, "Weary, did you sign this endorsement?" I said, "Sure I signed it." And he said, "What the hell?" And I said, "Harry, you've been down there three whole days. Haven't you straightened that District out yet?" That was the end of it for about three months and then I gradually seeped it back into the process and discussed it with him. But rather than start off by having a fight with my new crowd, I worked it that way, and it worked out pretty well.

Q: And the Division had decided before you came?

A: That's right. They were waiting. They had decided, once that I was announced as the Division Engineer, it was better to have me sign it than my predecessor.

But anyhow, it was interesting to move into the Division that had been supervising me. I went up there along about September. I left my family in Mobile because school had started, and it was too late to move the kids. I lived out in the BOQ at Fort McPherson. I devoted most of my time to getting around to the rest of the Division and visiting every project. I just about accomplished

that when the first of the year approached, and I went up to the Chief's office. Sam Sturgis was just coming in. I met him again. We had been talking back and forth of course on this project at Muscle Shoals. I told him I couldn't believe I was going to stay very long in Atlanta because I have had three this and three that. And he said, "Oh, yes you will. Why not, it's a good idea." Well I said, "I haven't moved my family. They're still sitting in Mobile." He said, "Move them. Move them." So I moved them.

About the first of January we found a house to rent. It was a terrible struggle, but we got it. I just got them in there, and I had to go to the Chief's office to a rivers and harbors board meeting. I got in and they said, "Sam Sturgis is looking for you." This was in late January, so I went to find the Chief of Engineers designate, and he said, "By the way, glad to see you here, because I want to tell you that you're going to Morocco." This had only been about four months by that time. Well, it was about two months later when I left the South Atlantic Division to go to Morocco and left the family sitting there again.

Let me put it this way. The District job is probably the most exciting and fun job there is, and the busier the District the more fun it is. The Division job however, has got a lot of challenges but you are a little farther away from the work. It's more paper work than the physical work. But it opens a tremendous area for you to cover and a lot of senators and governors to know.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time on visitations?

A: Yes, but you are once or twice removed. But it is interesting, and certainly you can call on all the experience you have had in the other assignments to make it possible to do the other job. Division Engineers have a tremendous opportunity to develop the talent that is in their hands on the part of the civilian employees and the District Engineers and the military people. The Division Engineer can have a big influence on that if he works at it, and he doesn't have to if he doesn't work at it, but it's an opportunity.

Q: Was it usual to go from a District within the Division to become the Division Engineer?

A: You seldom do. It's unusual.

As Division Engineer you have got a broader aspect. You stand off a little more, and you don't have quite the personal involvement. You don't have to feel like each one of your boys is exactly right down the line. You do go on things like the rivers and harbors board, which gives you much greater opportunity to grasp the picture across the whole country. You have to vote on these projects and correct them and so on. You get involved in calling on the military commanders. Of course, you do the same thing as a District Engineer, but you have got a much broader field and the Air Force as well. You have an opportunity to be influential with the various governors. You have a much broader scope than you did as a District Engineer. You have two things: you feel a little bit away from the job, so it isn't quite as exciting: but you also can look at it a little more dispassionately than you can as a District Engineer.

The fact that I had been District Engineer in Mobile made it easier to move into the Division because that was one of the largest Districts in the Division, and frankly I had to stay out of it to not continue to be District Engineer. So it made it a little easier that way to cover the rest of the Division. And, of course, the people down here in the Mobile District felt like they had a friend in court for a change.

Q: What about those experiences as background for your later assignments in the Chief's office?

A: Well, it was ideal training for moving into the Chief's office, which was not a place I ever wanted to move into. I wasn't particularly enamored of the Washington scene. It was fun visiting there and getting involved in things.

Q: Is it a dream of the Division Engineer to move into the Chief's office?

A: I don't know. It's a personal thing, I guess. It wasn't mine.

Q: Do you want to say anything more about your feelings about life in Washington?

A: No we'll get to that. I'll tell you. I was somewhat shaken when I realized I was heading for Morocco when they were just in the throes of all the investigations by the Congress into the complaints of waste and inefficiency.

Q: What was behind your getting selected to go to Morocco?

A: By then I was pretty experienced. I administered quite a few cost-plus-fixed-fee contracts. I might add with interest that I never had a claim settled by the board of review for claims in the Chief's office. I always managed somehow or other to stop them from reaching that stage and discussed them and cleared them up and solved them without going there, which I'm proud of. But it could mean that I must have been too easy. I don't know; I don't think so.

I had one [claim] while I was in the Mobile District; Jim Woodruff [Reservoir]. I don't remember what it was about, but I do know that I sent it on up through channels, and it hit the Chief's office. [Manning E.] Manny Seltzer, the chief of the legal division, called me, and said, "Weary, what in the hell are you doing sending a claim in here?" Well, I told him I couldn't get it worked out because my people told me I couldn't do some of the things I wanted to do. He asked what I wanted to do, and he said, "Damn right, you can do that. If I send it back to you, will you solve it?" And I said, "Yes, sir," so he sent it back to me, and we solved it.

Q: Your own legal staff had told you that you couldn't do it?

A: Yes, and I didn't want to overrule them if they gave me their advice.

I was concerned about going into Morocco. In essence it was like coming from a pleasant country club experience and going out into the desert in a windstorm, if you know what I mean.